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THE CEREMONY OF ✓
CONFIRMATION,

AS PRACTISED BY

The English Church,

TRIED BY

THE WORD OF GOD:

IN A

LETTER TO THE REV. J. G. GEDDES,

EPISCOPAL MINISTER, HAMILTON,

BY DAVID DYER,

CONGREGATIONAL MINISTER.

TORONTO:

E. LESSLIE & SONS.

1838.

THE CEREMONY OF CONFIRMATION,

&c. &c. &c.

REVEREND SIR:

It will, perhaps, excite your surprise, that I should venture to call in question the existence of a scriptural authority for the ceremony of confirmation, as practised in the church of which you are a minister. Yet a paramount sense of duty compels me to address some thoughts to you in reference to it, through the medium of the press; especially as the ceremony has been so lately attended to in this town, where, in the providence of God, we are respectively called to exercise our ministry.

Happy, indeed, should I have felt, to have been relieved of this duty by the non-existence of this rite in the Church of England. It is, however, not only practised, but much zeal is evinced in bringing forward candidates for it; and so much importance is attached to its celebration, that till it has been attended to, no one, however eminently pious and devoted to God, is allowed to obey the Saviour's command, by partaking of the Lord's Supper.

You will feel assured, I hope, that this Letter does not originate in any sectarian or unchristian feelings; but that its intention is to correct what may be wrong, and advance that which coincides with the word of God;—an intention I know that you will appreciate.

Episcopalian writers define confirmation to be "the laying on of hands, for the conveyance of the Holy Ghost, a rite by which persons, arrived at years of discretion, undertake the performance of the baptismal vows made for them by their sponsors." Now, sir, let us examine whether this solemnity has any sanction in the word of God: for says Jehovah, "to the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Here I submit that as we look through the Holy Scriptures, we do not find a single passage which tells us that it was either commanded or practised by Jesus Christ, who alone has a right to make laws, and enforce observances in his Church. This seems plainly acknowledged in the 25th article of the English

Church; which says: "Those five commonly called sacraments (in the Romish Church,) confirmation, penance, orders, matrimony, and extreme unction, are not to be counted sacraments of the Gospel; being such as have grown *partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles*; partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures, but yet have not like nature of Sacraments with Baptism and the Lord's Supper; for that they are not any visible sign or ceremony ordained by God." That this rite was not ordained by Christ, is a position which will not, then, be questioned; but do you suppose that if it really possessed the importance ascribed to it by the English Church, which teaches us that it conveys the Holy Ghost, and that its observance is essential to the proper participation of the Lord's Supper, the Saviour would have passed it by in silence? Such a supposition would be contrary to his usual practice, for he gave explicit directions respecting the profession of his name, and the qualification for admission to his Church.

Perhaps you will say, though there may be no evidence of this ceremony being instituted by Jesus Christ, yet it is clear that the word confirm is often used in the New Testament, especially in the Acts of the Apostles. This I admit, and answer, that it is found as frequently in the Old. Isaiah employs it, saying, "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees; say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong, fear not." Notwithstanding this, I suppose you will agree with me that confirmation formed no part of the Jewish Ritual. Judging, therefore, from the whole tenor of Scripture, there can be nothing adduced in favor of this rite from the frequent use of the word confirm, for we every where find that its meaning as given by Cruden (no mean authority) is correct, namely, "to strengthen, settle, or establish, to give an assurance of the truth or certainty of any thing." Confirmation is the work of the Holy Spirit; hence said Peter, "The God of all grace confirm and strengthen you." He confirmeth as the author and efficient cause of strength; the word, ordinances, and ministers, confirm as instruments or helps. To enumerate passages is unnecessary; if you will examine fully, you will, I believe, perceive that there is nothing in the frequent use of the word confirm, to favor the ceremony under consideration.

I will now proceed to the examination of those passages which are usually adduced in proof of the scriptural authority for the performance of this ceremony, though I feel that it must be apparent to its advocates, notwithstanding the importance which they attach to it, that there is good reason to suspect a misconception of the Apostles' words and actions in this particular, from the fact that Jesus Christ neither said nor did any thing to enforce or sanction such a rite. But let us examine the passages which are said to show its authenticity.

I believe the principal passage is Acts 8, 14-17. "Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem, heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost; for as yet it had fallen upon none of them, only they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus; then laid they their hands upon them and they received the Holy Ghost." Does this sanction the ceremony of confirmation? Not in the least; for as you read the passage you will see, first, that neither the term confirm nor any of its adjuncts is employed throughout the whole narrative. Secondly, that the passage applies directly and exclusively to the miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost, such as healing the sick—casting out unclean spirits—speaking in other tongues, &c.; gifts which Simon the sorcerer, of whom we read in the eighteenth verse, wished to purchase with money, that he might gratify his carnal, selfish and ambitious desires. You will perceive that the only thing in this passage that bears any similarity to the ceremony of confirmation is, the laying on of hands, which act affords no precedent, direction, or justification for the practice of your Bishops in the performance of this rite; but shows that they are quite inconsistent, unless they, like the Apostles, have the power of imparting miraculous gifts; but though they profess to be the legitimate successors of those divinely inspired ministers, yet they do not pretend that by the laying on of hands, they can bestow sight to the blind—hearing to the deaf—strength to the weak—life to the dead—or ability to speak with other tongues; if so, it would be generous, humane, and highly beneficial for them occasionally to visit the abodes of the diseased, infirm, and dying, together with our colleges and schools, bestowing their miraculous endowments, and commissioning the happy recipients of these confirmation favors, to go forth on similar beneficial errands. But they disclaim all power of this kind. Such being the case, I would ask you in the language of an excellent writer, "since they make no pretensions to the effects which followed the laying on of the Apostles' hands, why do we see them with such solemn pomp practice the ceremony? It is replied that they profess, by the administration of this rite, to communicate only the ordinary gifts of the spirit; as an Episcopalian writer has affirmed*—*only the ordinary gifts!* Then why do they profess to communicate the ordinary influences of the spirit! and what are these? why, such as are infinitely more superior—infinitely more sublime and valuable than those which are denominated *extraordinary*. The enlightening and sanctifying influences of the spirit—the gifts of spiritual light, and life, and love, and holiness, infinitely exceed in value, an ability to

* Biddulph.

speak with tongues, a faith that can remove mountains, a power to cast out devils, to heal all manner of diseases, or even to raise the dead. It is to be remembered, however, that when it is said that by the laying on of the Apostles' hands, the Holy Ghost was given, we are not to understand, the *illuminating* and sanctifying graces of the Holy Ghost; these the Apostles never did, nor never could dispense; but the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, and a power to work miracles. The case then stands thus between the Apostles and the Bishops: the Apostles imparted gifts by the laying on of hands which modern Bishops do not pretend to bestow; and modern Bishops by the same act profess to impart gifts which the Apostles did not presume to bestow. Blessed Episcopacy indeed, if it carries with it such gifts! But how foolish and wild is the claim, if neither Scripture nor reason lend it the least support! And why should the world be amused, and infidels have such occasion to scoff, by the use of a solemn ceremony, for the conferring of those gifts which no mortal man ever had power to bestow? The age is critical and discerning; for the honor of the Christian name, therefore, and the dignity of Christian Bishops, all claims not founded on Scripture or reason, and all offices and rites not evidently supported by them, should be entirely and promptly relinquished."†

But should you reject my assumption in reference to this passage, I am sure the following forcible remarks from that excellent Episcopalian Commentator, the Rev. T. Scott, on it, will command your attention. He says: "The rite of confirmation as practised by many Christian Churches, has often been stated to be a continuation of this Apostolical imposition of hands, for the confirmation of new converts, by the Holy Ghost thus given to them. But it is far from being evident that this was done universally by the Apostles, or those who immediately succeeded them. However, as miraculous powers rather than sanctifying grace were then conferred, unless such gifts were now connected with that observance, the parallel must fail. To advance this observance into a sacrament, and even above a sacrament, (as it is, when the Holy Ghost is supposed to be conferred by the imposition of hands, and the use of the Apostles' words) puts the subject in a very different light: doubtless it was at first thus magnified to *exalt the Episcopal order*, to whom the administration of it was confined, *as if* they were properly intrusted with Apostolical authority. But as miracles are out of the question, to follow the Apostles in faith, humility, diligence, in preaching in season and out of season, piety, self-denial, &c., is the only adequate method of magnifying either the clerical or Episcopal office. *Assuredly as this matter is generally managed, it*

† Sibree.

must be allowed to be an evil, and it ought either to be attended to in another manner, or not at all."

But the advocates of Episcopal confirmation, finding a difficulty from the absence of the word *confirm* in the passage above quoted, have endeavored to extricate themselves from it, by uniting this with other passages in the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters of the Acts of the Apostles. But this does not in the least relieve them; for, first, the phrase "laying on hands" is not found in either of the chapters; yet this you regard as essential to the due administration of the rite. Secondly, there is no Scriptural authority to justify the connecting of what is said in one chapter of confirming, and what is said in another of laying on of the Apostles' hands; the two acts were different in their nature—different in the manner of their performance—and different in the ends designed; the latter being for the impartation of miraculous powers, and the former for the establishment of the believers in the Gospel; and, thirdly, you will see by the 22nd verse of the 14th chapter, that the Apostles confirmed the believers by preaching and exhortation: "confirming the souls of the disciples, (the word *and* inserted in the passage is in italics, therefore not in the original) exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that they must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." You will perceive that this connecting link cannot be sustained; and that there is nothing here to support this rite. Do you not feel that it is strange that good men who teach the will of God, should thus unite and confound passages that are essentially different, and thereby mislead those who depend on their instructions.

I now come to notice another passage that is urged in support of this ceremony—Hebrews 6. 2. but though you will see that the phrase laying on of hands is here employed, yet, unhappily for the advocates of this ceremony, there is no mention made of the word *confirm*. With this fact before us, I would ask you, what justifies Episcopal writers and speakers in appropriating this text to the support of this rite as practised in their Church? It certainly is not the connexion of the text, for there is not the most distant reference made to any such observance:—nor is it the juvenile state in religion of the Hebrews at that time, at "first principles," for Apostolical confirmation was identified with advancement, establishment, and "perfection" in religion:—neither is it the opinion of commentators, for those generally agree with the Rev. T. Scott, in saying, that the laying on of hands refers to the miraculous gifts conferred by the Apostles on the disciples, in attestation of the truth of the gospel.

Thus, sir, I think it has been clearly proved, that this ceremony, which is deemed by the Episcopal Church of such worth and utility, without observing which, no one may approach the table of the Lord, is not of Christ's ordaining—that it is

at variance with the Scriptural meaning of the word confirm—and that it is altogether different from Apostolic confirmation. It will not be sufficient in answer to all this to say, “that the opinions of the fathers favor it,”—that “in the service you use a prayer which was compiled fifteen hundred years ago,” or “that it is practised by all the *national* Churches on the continent of Europe.” To this I would reply in the words of Jesus, “What is written in the law, how readest thou?” and in the words of the 25th article of your Church, above quoted, all this is “*of the corrupt following of the Apostles.*” The enforcement of this ceremony by the English Church, bears a strong resemblance to the conduct of the Jewish Pharisees, who taught for doctrines the commandments of men; who bound heavy burdens, grievous to be borne, and laid them on men’s shoulders; who were eager to make proselytes; and zealous to pay tithe of mint, and anise and cummin; but who omitted the weightier matters of the law judgment, mercy, and faith; for you make an ordinance of Jesus Christ secondary to this rite of human institution.

I am, sir, prepared further to assert, that this ceremony is not only unauthorised by the word of God, but that its several parts are opposed thereto. Notice:

1st. The persons empowered by the English Church to perform it. We find from Episcopal writers on this subject, and the universal practice of your Church, that the privilege to perform this ceremony is confined to “superior or governing officers;” that it is restricted to Diocesan Bishops; “whose peculiar and incommunicable prerogative it is, and who, as they possess the sole honor, so have the whole charge.” Why it is thus confined we are nowhere told; certainly this does not accord with the word of God; for there we find that confirming the believers was not the particular duty of any peculiar order of ministers, whether Apostles, Bishops, or Evangelists, but that it was one important branch of ministerial service. This you will see confirmed by Acts 15. 32.: “And Judas and Silas being also prophets themselves, exhorted them with many words, and confirmed them.” They are, it is true, spoken of as “prophets,” and as “chief men among the brethren,” but it is evident they were not Apostles, nor Bishops, (that is pastors of Churches in a Scriptural sense) but they were prominent members of the Church at Jerusalem, who were “apt to teach,” and, therefore, may be called Evangelists, or Missionaries, or itinerant Ministers.

I know, that in support of this peculiar prerogative, it has been said, “that Peter and John were sent to confirm the Christians at Samaria, because that Philip, who was there, could not do it, he being only in Deacon’s orders.” But where do we find authority for this assertion? for Philip appears to have been equally eminent with Judas and Silas. Is it in the 3d chapter of the Acts, which contains the narra-

..ive? No—there is not a word to this effect in it. Is it in Philip's want of ability to teach or work miracles? No, for the same chapter tells us that he "preached Christ unto" the people; and that they with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did; for unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them; and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. Where, then, is the proof of Philip's inability to confirm the Samaritan believers? I confess I cannot find a reason, and, therefore, will cheerfully leave it to the fertile minds of those who advanced, or who favor, this gratuitous assertion.

The exclusive assumption of this office by Diocesan Bishops, originated, first, in the mistaken supposition, that confirming the believers in the faith of the gospel was identical with the bestowment of miraculous endowments; and, secondly, in the flagrant error that they having descended in a regular line of succession from the Apostles, have an exclusive right to perform this act of confirmation, as a parallel to the Apostolic act of bestowing miraculous gifts. Notwithstanding they acknowledge their inability to impart the favors the Apostles gave; why, then, we may justly ask, make such high professions? Why exact from young and thoughtless candidates such solemn vows?—vows which they never can perform. Why not take the simple rule of Scripture for a guide, and abandon wholly, and at once, what is so utterly destitute of heavenly origin, and scriptural utility? To continue it, shows a prejudice which is unbecoming an enlightened Christian mind, and a spiritual community.

We will now proceed in the examination of this ceremony by the word of God, and notice it—

II. With reference to its Recipients. They are usually children or young persons; your Rubric says: "So soon as *children* are come to a competent age, they shall be brought to the Bishop; and every one shall have a Godfather or Godmother as a witness of their confirmation." Those, I find, are considered as transgressors, either on the part of their sponsors or themselves, who neglect the observance of this ceremony till they come to riper years, unless they have been so situated as to prevent their attending to it. But children were not those who were confirmed by the Apostles—children were not those on whom they laid their hands—they did not impart miraculous endowments unto children; and the probability is that they were not generally young persons, but such as had arrived at years of maturity. They are described as "the people," they are called "men and women; the brethren, disciples," who had previously united themselves in Christian Churches; for it is said that Paul with Silas, went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the Churches. Thus, you see, those whom the Apostles confirmed were not the

thoughtless, giddy, and profane, but individuals who had given evidence of a change of heart—who had solemnly and prayerfully assumed the Christian name—who had, in view of persecution, imprisonment and death, voluntarily given themselves to God and to his Church—they were individuals who evinced the sincerity of their professions, by previously living, not to themselves, but to God, by “purging themselves of all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, and righteously, and Godly, in this present evil world.”

Those primitive disciples were confirmed, not once only, at the triennial visitation of a Bishop, as is the case in the church of England, but repeatedly; yea, whenever they attended the faithful preaching of the word. They were confirmed not with the view of admitting them to a participation of the Lord's Supper, for these privileges they *previously enjoyed*, but it was by establishing them in the faith and hope of the Gospel—by further enlightening their minds in the knowledge of Christ—by comforting their hearts with his love, and supporting their confidence in his promises—to prepare them for the sacrifice of their friends and their possessions—for the bearing of reproach—for the enduring of great fights of affliction—and, if need be, for the surrendering of their life for Christ's name sake.

These, sir, were the persons, and this the design, of Apostolic confirmation; but how different, in both respects, is the observance practised in the English Church! I would not be uncharitable, but suffer me to ask, are not the most of those who submit to this ceremony now, destitute of vital godliness, ignorant of spiritual illumination, and insensible of the inward satisfying pleasures which personal piety affords? Are they not walking contrary to the spirit, in accordance with the flesh, and are carnally minded, which is death? Would they, if times of persecution came, “endure hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ,” “take joyfully the spoiling of their goods,” and “rejoice in being counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Christ?” Such did the recipients of Apostolic confirmation.

The qualification required of the recipients for the Episcopal confirmation, is *ability to “say, in their mother tongue, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments,”* and also to “answer to the other questions of this short Catechism.” This is the sum total of what is required of candidates for the modern ceremony, in which they are declared by the Bishop to be, “Regenerated by water and the Holy Ghost,” and by which they are qualified to partake of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper.

You will notice, that the Rubric does not require in candidates *scriptural knowledge*. There is not a word said respecting their acquaintance with the word of God, or their diligence in studying it; and there is the same profound si-

lence regarding scripture, this only sufficient guide in faith and practice, throughout the Catechism and Confirmation Service; and it is not presumed or expected, that those young persons even possess a copy of the sacred book. *Human* compositions, in this Confirmation Service, supplant Divine, and a knowledge of the former, to the almost entire exclusion of the latter, is represented, and young persons are taught to believe it, quite sufficient to introduce them to a "state of salvation,"—sufficient to justify the Bishop, by laying his hands upon their heads, to certify them by that sign of God's "favor and gracious goodness" *particularly towards them*—sufficient to entitle them to all the privileges of the Church of God on earth, and to encourage their hope of everlasting life in heaven. This bears a strict resemblance to the prescription of the Romish Church, but not to the practice of the Apostles of the Saviour. They "reasoned with the people out of the Scriptures;" they "constantly persuaded them concerning Jesus, both out of the law and the prophets." Every thing they did had its sanction in, and coincided with, the mind of the Holy Ghost. Their motto and their exhortation was, "Search the Scriptures." Their object in confirmation was to establish the believers in the faith and knowledge of the Scriptures; and one of the chief characteristics of the recipients of Apostolic confirmation was, "that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so," for they were anxious to possess a *Divine* reason for their practice, and the hope that was in them.

Again, you will observe, that the qualification for Episcopal confirmation does not *consist in faith*; that inward spiritual principle "which is of the operation of the Holy Ghost; which works by love and purifies the heart," and which the Scriptures teach us is the essential characteristic of all *true disciples*, "without which it is impossible to please God." Though this ceremony is considered by your church so important, and its attendant blessings so great and precious, yet the preparation for it is not the conversion of the heart to God, the personal possession of "the spirit of Christ," but the mere repetition in their "mother tongue of the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the ten Commandments," and ability to answer "the other questions of this short catechism." Such a qualification for the admission unto Christian privileges, is utterly at variance with the will of Christ, who enforced the necessity of a change of heart, and the profession of a saving faith. It is opposed to that which, by the Apostles, was universally demanded of the primitive disciples. Those whom the Apostolic guides admitted to the Church, are described as "saints," as "believers," as "holy brethren," as "the circumcision who worship God *in the spirit*," as "the followers of God," and as "the temples of the Holy Ghost;" they

professed faith, and consequently, were "such as should be saved." This is the feature whereby they, and all true christians are known, "that they believed in the Lord," and without this faith in candidates for this ceremony *now*, it will be in vain that they have repeated the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Episcopal Catechism—it will be in vain that a Bishop's hand has been laid upon their heads—it will be *utterly in vain* that he has certified "by that sign of God's gracious favor and goodness," for the Scriptures declare that it is faith in Christ that justifies from sin—that faith gives us peace with God—that faith overcomes the world—that it is faith which cheers in death—and that it is faith which will bring a glorious resurrection to eternal life. The Lord Jesus Christ, the *Head* of the Church, has said, "he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

I must request you again to observe, that the qualification required of candidates for Episcopal confirmation, does not consist of holiness of life. I know that the question is publicly proposed to all, not *individually*, but collectively, at the same time, "whether they renew the vows made in their name at their baptism," and they, *all at once*, answer in the affirmative, and the service proceeds on the assumption that they are all sincere, though there is no evidence supplied of sincerity and integrity of heart. Perhaps you will reply, they "are examined and approved." True; but what is necessary for that approval? simply the repetition of the lessons enumerated in your Rubric, to do which would not cost many boys half a day's attention; and in some instances, ability even for this is not required. But may not this, and much more, be done by those who are entirely destitute of spiritual life, who would delight in a visit to the ball-room, the theatre, the card-table, and the race-course, while they would neglect Christian duties, and a call to social prayer? How different to the qualification required by Jesus Christ, who said, "not every one who saith Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of Heaven; but he that *doeth the will* of my father who is in heaven." "Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple." "Whosoever shall *do the will of God*, the same is my brother, and sister and mother." Jesus spake of Christians as "the light of the world," as the "salt of the earth," and as the witnesses of himself before a crooked and perverse generation. Such are the qualifications which you *do not* require of candidates for Episcopal confirmation, but which are essential to spiritual happiness, and usefulness. A few words shall now suffice in the examination of what you do require. First—The candidates for Episcopal confirmation, are to say they believe in the *articles of the Christian faith*; those, if I rightly judge, are not the

thirty-nine articles of the English church; nor the fundamental articles of faith as *recorded in the Scriptures*, but those which are contained in what is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, of which an excellent writer has justly said, "As a summary of Christian doctrine, it is extremely indefinite and imperfect. It maintains a deep dead silence on the important and fundamental doctrines of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, original sin, the atonement, justification by faith, and the nature and necessity of good works. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, are merely spoken of as historical facts, without the slightest allusion to the design of those facts." Yet the bare repetition of this creed, and the acknowledgement of a belief *of it*, is the chief part of what is required by the Church of England to constitute an individual a true believer in Christ.

With regard to this Creed, it is but proper to observe, that it has long been acknowledged, even by Episcopalians themselves, to be a forgery. Lord King observes in his enquiry, (p. 57,) "As for that Creed which is commonly called the Apostles' Creed, all learned persons are now agreed that it never was composed by them, nor was it known within the first three hundred years after Christ." This, indeed, must be apparent to every candid mind, were it not acknowledged, from its remarkable deficiency in Scripture doctrine.

But do you suppose that this Creed, which candidates are required to say, and express a belief of, is ever seriously thought of by a majority of them? I cannot; for if so, they would not make such an unqualified affirmation, saying, "All this I steadfastly believe." I thus speak, because I could not myself; for the phrase in it "he descended into hell," is exceedingly objectionable, and is grounded on a total misapplication of the Psalmist's words, as used by Peter, in reference to the burial of Jesus Christ. The idea conveyed by the expression is, that after Christ was dead and buried he descended into the place of everlasting torment; an assertion which no part of Scripture will substantiate, and for which your best Episcopalian writers give no valid reason. Yet this your Church requires children and young persons both to say and believe, previous to their compliance with a plain command of Jesus Christ.

But in addition to this Creed, the candidates for Episcopal confirmation are required to repeat the Lord's prayer, the ten Commandments, and to answer the other questions of the short Episcopal Catechism—a Catechism in which the highly erroneous doctrine of baptismal regeneration is taught—a Catechism which is not to be compared to the Assembly's, or any of Dr. Watts's; and concerning which Baxter has said "there are omitted in this Catechism some of the essential attributes of God, without which he cannot be rightly known; as also the doctrine of man's fall; the person, office,

and properties of the Redeemer are very insufficiently opened ; *there is no mention of the Holy Scriptures* in it, and the doctrine of the covenant of grace is very defectively expressed ; and so is the doctrine of sanctification, and other parts of the work of the Holy Spirit." "If," says an eminent Episcopalian writer, "the Catechism is considered in the light of a summary of the necessary erudition of a Churchman, it must be acknowledged that it is very defective." *

Such is the qualification that the English Church requires the candidates for confirmation and communion to possess. You perceive how much opposed it is to that which Christ required—to that which was demanded by the Apostles—how utterly insufficient it is in the sight of God as a test of personal religion, of inward spiritual life—and how inadequate it is as a safe-guard against that deceitful foe, these carnal vanities, and sinful lusts, which the Church, notwithstanding, makes those children and young persons promise to renounce.

Let us proceed in this examination, to notice, III The promises that candidates for Episcopal confirmation are required to make. They are required to vow that they do "renounce the devil and all his works; the vain pomp and glory of this world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh; and that they will neither follow nor be led by them;" that they "believe all the articles of the Christian faith," and will "obediently keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of their life." Such is the promise which the English Church exacts, and what Christian is there, who does not shudder at the thought of children or young persons, who are generally unacquainted with the "plague of their own hearts," with the "deceitfulness of sin," with the "evil of the world," and with "the devices of Satan," making such a solemn public pledge ? How different is the spirit which the promise made in this confirmation service breathes, to that which David, "the man after God's own heart," possessed, when he exclaimed, "who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults;" "*hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not;*" "*keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings.*" I am free to confess that with my consciousness of the infirmities of human nature, and the extent of personal corruption, I should tremble at making such a promise as the English Church exacts of those youthful candidates for confirmation. *In the form required I could not do it;* for it appears to me to encourage self-dependance, ignorance of man's inability, and neglect of the Holy Spirit's aid. This is not in accordance with the word of God, for there, in immediate connection with the exhortation "work out your salvation with fear and trembling," we find the kind

* Rev. A. Cox, A. M., Proposals for a "Revised Liturgy."

assurance, "for it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure."

You may say, in answer to this, that the Bishop in the charge he gives, reminds those youthful candidates of the source of their ability to fulfil their vows; to which it is just to reply, that there is nothing to oblige the Bishop to give them a charge—that it is quite optional with him to speak to them of this or not—and that should he do so, it would in no way *justify the exaction* of such a pledge, or if exacted, the omission in such a solemn matter, of such an all important truth.

The English Church inflexibly requires this solemn pledge of every candidate for confirmation; but as it is, notwithstanding its high assumptions, still subject to a trial by the word of God, suffer me to ask you, what is there in the Scriptures to warrant its obliging those children and young persons to make so grave a vow? Did Jesus require such a pledge of his disciples? No; he said to them, "follow me," and they immediately arose from their various avocations "and followed him." Did he command his disciples to exact such a promise from those who believed their words? No; the essential qualifications he enjoined them to seek were repentance and faith. But did the Apostles require such a vow? We have no proof that they did; we do not read that the early disciples, pledged, promised, or vowed, as a prerequisite for confirmation, or Christian fellowship, but that "they believed." Their piety was not of a *restrained national character*, but was the free, voluntary, and unrestrained expression of the heart towards God. They "first *gave themselves* to the Lord, and then to his people, according to his word." Here, again, you find a variance between this episcopal ceremony and the word of God; and the enforcement of this confirmation pledge, under these circumstances, is most erroneous: for it implies that human beings have a right to legislate in matters of religion. It denies God's exclusive right to rule; and in effect says, that mortals understand the wants of human, and the requirements of the divine nature, as well as he. It denotes that man has a right to bind the conscience, and control the heart. But religious obedience is only acceptable to God as it is rendered in a *voluntary* compliance with his *exclusive* law.

How short-sighted is this human legislation! What benefit can result from the exaction of this public vow? If the subjects of episcopal confirmation are *sincere and devoted Christians*, their own inward principles will necessarily lead them to this resistance of evil, and practice of virtue; for they will hate the former and love the latter. But if they are not the true disciples of the Saviour, those vows will never make them so; or induce them "to follow after righteousness in the fear of the Lord;" "because the carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither

indeed can be." How offensive then must this be in the sight of God! How contrary to the spirituality of religion! and how injurious to the interests of Christ's kingdom!

This vow having been made, the Bishop lays his hand upon the heads of those children and young persons, and (distressing to affirm) without any knowledge of their previous character—without any genuine mark of personal religion, thus addresses the heart-searching Jehovah concerning them:—*"Almighty and everlasting God, who hast vouchsafed to regenerate these thy servants by water and the Holy Ghost, and hast given unto them forgiveness of all their sins"!!!* And lest this should not suffice, he certifies them, as he lays his hand upon their heads, "by that sign of God's favor and gracious goodness towards them." He does this, notwithstanding the 25th article of the English church says, that this observance has *"not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God;"* but *has grown of the corrupt following of the Apostles.* He does it in the absence of scriptural authority or evidence of the persons being in a state of grace.

Do not be surprised at my use of earnest language in speaking of this act; for the nature of religion, and the interests of immortal souls, fully justify me in it. What, I would ask, is the declaration, under such circumstances, and concerning many of those children and young persons, that "they are regenerated and forgiven," but *lying not to men but God?*—What is the positive certification in this solemn manner of God's favor and gracious goodness towards them, but offensive presumption in a mortal man?—and what is its influence on the subjects of this ceremony, but "daubing them with untempered mortar?" What but deceiving souls? Let the word of God decide the case.

The consequences arising from the performance of this ceremony are most dangerous. "Ignorant persons who are taught to consider a Bishop as a successor of the Apostles, an ambassador of Christ, a special minister of God, who have too good an opinion of such a man to think he would declare a falsehood, when they hear him solemnly affirm that they are fully justified, pardoned, regenerated, and interested in God's favor, of course conclude that their state is safe, even while they continue in their sins!—and as full remission of sins, and the blessings of salvation are to be obtained on such easy terms, can we be surprised when we see many flocking to accept these favors?" No pious minister of the gospel can be ignorant of the fact, that men are "prone to deceive themselves with false hopes, and to substitute good purposes, professions, and vows, in the place of real repentance and holiness of life. This is one of the chief hindrances to their becoming truly pious and devoted to God; and as the office of confirmation plainly and directly tends to nurture these false hopes, therefore, so far from its conducing to holiness of con-

duct, it greatly tends to promote that self-deception, which is fatal to the souls of men."

The whole of this ceremony appears to me to be directly opposed to that spiritual devotion which God seeketh, and which Christ enjoined, when he said, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." It is true that there are the solemn forms—that there are the attitudes of devotion—that there is the affecting language of supplication and thanksgiving; but, for the most part, I fear there is a destitution of corresponding spiritual emotions in the heart. Such worship is forcibly described by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, 29, 13—"Wherefore the Lord said, this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men."—Such worship, saith God, "my soul hateth."

Now, sir, I conclude:—I hope that in this examination of Episcopal confirmation, by the word of God, I have not said any thing, or made use of any term, that can be justly offensive—that is in the least derogatory to a Christian minister, or contrary to the word of God. I have pursued the examination freely, and spoken plainly; but the plainest expressions are extracted from the word of God; to which we both profess unqualified subjection;—and "whether the continuance of this ceremony, in its present form of administration, be either for the honor of the administrator, or the benefit of the church, I, with all humility, leave to the consideration of those, whom, I thank God, it more immediately concerns than myself;" but who, with the writer, are to be faithful in the house of God—to watch for souls as those who must give an account to the Great Shepherd, who will shortly come; before whom it will be an awful thing to have immortal souls required at our hands.

I am, Reverend Sir,

Most respectfully,

And obediently your's,

DAVID DYER.